

# Baldwin County Growth and Job Creation

1100 Words

Rauf Bolden

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“Quality-of-life should not be sacrificed for economic growth,” I thought.

The State of Alabama is enjoying an economic resurgence, according to the website Alabama Newscenter, raising doubts in my mind, wondering if Leading Market Indicators (LMI) for Realtors are representative of what is happening in the southern part of the state. According to their website our local area has a Housing Index of 1.01, meaning growth is stagnant. Housing indices, suffering from a lack of passion, clearly not factoring in the quality-of-life we have in Orange Beach.

The last recession was apocalyptic, crashing the housing market, causing foreclosures, bailed out banks, followed by the BP Oil Spill. Of course news that the State of Alabama is enjoying an economic recovery is good to hear. Today Gadsden and Florence are in the top-ten cities for growth in the country, according to the National Association of Home Builders with housing prices reportedly rising.

The average home prices in Orange Beach are high: Foley at \$153,200, Gulf Shores at \$235,500, and Orange Beach at \$449,000, according to the Real Estate Web Site: zillow.com, illustrating the affect of high demand and small supply on the island. These numbers do not reflect economic growth, being more a sign of Reverse-Ghettoization, because it is so expensive to purchase property in Orange Beach.

Sustainable growth needs job creation, luckily the OWA Amusement Park is establishing 3500 local jobs, encouraging people to move to Baldwin County, purchasing homes, founding families, and building sustainable communities. Job creation equals growth, letting families buy into the American Dream. The OWA Venue will be the most significant economic driver of our generation, stimulating prosperity, small-business investment and the way-we-live in South-Baldwin County.

Baldwin Expansionism will affect the quality-of-life for Orange Beach Residents, starting with schools. It is no secret the schools in Orange Beach and Gulf Shores are overcrowded, delegating children to trailers, requiring teachers to educate in surroundings where students cannot work comfortably, possibly causing more disciplinary problems than scholarly achievements.

The Board of Education will give residents on the island a chance, forming a Special Tax District, adding 3 Mills to their property tax, seeking a solution to overcrowding,

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possibly with a Referendum in 2017. One proposal is to build a dedicated High School, bonding the Tax District for \$60 Million, constructing on land donated by the Craft Family, making the Tax District landlords of the building with the Board of Education responsible for curriculum.

A second perspective is to bond the Tax District for \$60 Million, building a Middle School in Orange Beach for \$25 Million, keeping \$35 Million in reserves, busing children from Gulf Shores to Orange Beach, consolidating Gulf Shores Middle School and Gulf Shores High School under one umbrella, leaving the Board of Education as landlord in Gulf Shores and the Special-Tax District as landlord in Orange Beach.

Schools are essential for growth, offering quality education, encouraging people to re-locate, being the prime motivator for many families, resolving the Tax District proposals will increase prosperity, being a catalyst for migration to South Baldwin County, because quality jobs and quality education spur economic growth.

Little Johnnie listened to his father, "We used to go fishing for red snapper all the time."

"What happened?" Little Johnnie asked.

"They shortened the season."

Quality-of-life is an intangible, composed of many pieces, working in concert, producing a result that is harmonious for the entire community, perhaps feeling safe when you go to the market late at night, having forgotten the milk, perhaps calling for help when a relative collapses at your house, knowing assistance is three-minutes away, perhaps knowing the Police will help Little Johnnie when he has an accident on his bicycle, playing chase after school, perhaps knowing the Gulf is being seeded with artificial reefs so a father can take his children fishing. All this and more make the quality-of-life in Orange Beach exceptional.

OWA providing jobs in Foley, growing the local economy in Baldwin County will change the quality-of-life in Orange Beach, adding pressure for single-family dwellings and school seats. As I said earlier Reverse-Ghettoization is a factor, because housing prices are so high on the island. This does not mean that people living and working in South Baldwin will not want to come to Orange Beach as tourists, enjoying our beaches, restaurants and fishing, certainly invigorating our local economy.

The BP Oil Spill provided an opportunity for the oil baron to make amends. Unfortunately, Orange Beach was awarded \$0 in the first round, understanding our charter-fishing industry was disseminated, reporting one suicide as a result, desperately needing additional reefs seeded, perhaps being penalized because Orange Beach is a good steward of taxpayers' monies, having substantial funds in reserve.

Governor Bentley awarded \$63 Million in BP Funds as follows: Fisheries and ecosystem monitoring in marine waters and the Gulf of Mexico: about \$4.4 million; Bon Secour-Oyster Bay wetland acquisition: about \$12.5 million; Dauphin Island conservation acquisition: about \$3.5 million; Lightning Point acquisition and restoration, Phase I: about \$6 million; Fowl River watershed restoration, coastal splits and wetlands project, Phase I: about \$1 million; Gulf Highlands Conservation Acquisition: approximately \$36 million, according to Local 15 TV News.

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“If the OWA Amusement Park comes in here poaching our best people they will ruin the possibility of building trust within our local communities,” he said.

OWA is not the face-of-evil, racking and pillaging the countryside, purposely altering the comfort zone. In contrast they are building a small city within Foley, offering to support the community through job creation, purchasing goods and services, using local vendors, paying Business Licenses, Building Permits and taxes, acquiring land, installing infrastructure, becoming the largest-single employer in the entire history of Baldwin County, misunderstandings will occur, because the greater good must be served and the greater good trumps the fear of someone offering your employees a better opportunity. OWA is not trying to steal your staff, showing instead how the free market works, adapting to change.

Baldwin County’s growth and job creation needs greater-school capacity to foster prosperity, knowing OWA is providing 3500 new jobs, supplying the school seats is up to us. The fact that a new player is at the table, embracing the idea of economic development rather than economic encroachment is essential for all participants to enjoy success in their jobs, growing the economy, fostering excellence in education and providing a better quality-of-life in our new inter-connected communities.

**ENDS.**